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SUBJECT: UK AND SOUTH AFRICA: JULY UK-RSA FORUM OPPORTUNITY
TO "MEND FENCES"

REF: LONDON 1426

Classified By: Political Counselor Richard Mills, reasons 1.4 (b/d).

11. (C/NF) Summary. South Africa (RSA) will host Foreign Secretary David Miliband and a high-level HMG delegation in Pretoria for the 8th bi-annual UK-RSA Bilateral Forum July 7 - 8. FCO officials describe the UK's relations with President Mbeki as "the worst the UK has had in recent history" -- a fact that perplexes Ministers -- and say the bilateral forum is designed to "mend fences." FCO officials report that Ministers across HMG "fret" about the UK's relationship with RSA, need continual reminding of how the UK's apartheid policy affected many in the current RSA political elite, and need their expectations of what can be accomplished with RSA carefully managed. The Forum agenda has not been set yet. Ministers wanted a more "free-flowing, ideas-based, Labour-style discussion," but the South Africans wanted a detailed, written agenda. The UK hopes to frame the discussion around the FCO's new strategic priorities (reftel), including conflict prevention, counter-terrorism and counter-proliferation, climate change, and migration. Zimbabwe, with the second round of elections scheduled days before the forum, is also likely to feature prominently in discussions and remains the "thorn in the UK-RSA bilateral relationship." Potential new visa requirements for South Africans to visit the UK may also make discussions uncomfortable. There is currently a lot of bad blood between the UK and President Mbeki, and the bilateral forum is unlikely to improve that relationship. End summary.

The "Odd Relationship"

12. (C/NF) In separate meetings on May 23 and June 4, the Head of the Foreign Office's Africa Department - South, Janet Douglas, and Southern Africa Section Team Leader, John Smith, described the UK's "odd relationship" with South Africa (RSA) and Ministers' desire to improve relations. Douglas said the UK's relationship with President Mbeki is "the worst the UK has had in recent history, which Ministers fret about." FCO Minister for Africa Lord Malloch-Brown, in particular, has been frustrated with how unproductive RSA has been in the UN, especially given the fact that Prime Minister Brown attended the UNSC debate on Africa in April. Douglas said that FCO officials have to "constantly manage Ministers' expectations about what can and will be done" with RSA and how the UK's "unhelpful policies during apartheid directly affected many who are in power now." Smith said RSA's problems with the UK stem from the fact UK foreign policy is still seen by many South Africans to "smack of colonialism."

An Opportunity to Mend Fences

13. (C/NF) Douglas said the UK-RSA Bilateral Forum July 7 - 8 in Pretoria will be "an opportunity to mend fences and move beyond the bilateral relationship to strategic priorities." Foreign Secretary David Miliband will lead the UK delegation

and will be accompanied by Secretary of State of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Hilary Benn; Home Office Minister of State for Security and Counter-Terrorism Tony McNulty; Minister of State for Public Health Dawn Primarolo; and Joint FCO - Department for Business, Enterprise, and Regulatory Reform Minister of State Lord Digby Jones.

Working Through the Agenda:
Zim Elections Could Make It Uncomfortable

¶4. (C/NF) Smith said Ministers had hoped to have "a free-flowing, ideas-based, Labour-style discussion" to build relationships with RSA political elites, but RSA has insisted on a detailed, written agenda, which has not yet been determined. Smith thought there would be a "tour d'horizon" of foreign policy issues, including Zimbabwe, Sudan, Somalia, the Middle East Peace Process, Iraq, and international institution reform. With Zimbabwe's second round of elections set for June 27, just days before the Forum convenes, Smith thought Zimbabwe could produce some "uncomfortable discussions depending on the results," with the UK likely making strong statements about violence, intimidation, and manipulation and RSA likely defending the contest as free and fair. Smith said Zimbabwe was the "thorn in the UK-RSA bilateral relationship."

The Rest of the Agenda:
Migration and the UK's Visa Requirements

¶5. (C/NF) In addition to discussing conflict prevention and peacekeeping, counter-terrorism and counter-proliferation, and climate change, the UK plans to discuss migration. According to Smith, HMG is in the middle of a world-wide

review of its visa requirements for all non-OECD countries, and initial results from the second phase of the project indicate that RSA citizens "may be at risk" of needing visas. Smith said Ministers want to discuss this with RSA before any final decisions are made in order to mitigate the inevitable fallout of any new visa requirements. Smith said a decision will be made in "about six months" and it will be "a difficult call either way."

International Institution Reform and a RSA UNSC Seat

¶6. (C/NF) Smith said the South Africans were "excited and nervous" after Foreign Secretary Miliband made comments in September 2007 about RSA having a "clear claim" to a seat on the UN Security Council, a comment Miliband later backtracked on. Smith said that since Miliband's public comments "there has officially been no clear UK position on which African member state should be on the UNSC;" however, the internal UK preference is RSA, as HMG thinks RSA has the capacity to perform the function and will be "less difficult with its Africa-ness affirmed" by being the African permanent UNSC member. Smith also intimated that RSA officials quietly appreciated the UK's vote of confidence, but said clear UK support for RSA would make rallying African support for RSA's candidacy more difficult.

On Brown and Zuma

¶7. (C/NF) Smith said Prime Minister Brown and ANC President Jacob Zuma had an "uncharacteristically long, two-hour meeting" in April when Zuma visited the UK. While Brown and Zuma had met under the auspices of being the leaders of sister political parties, Smith was confident that the meeting had irritated President Mbeki, who "has never gotten on well with Brown." Smith said Brown and Zuma had had a very good meeting and had even struck up a personal rapport.

Comment

¶8. (C/NF) At present, there is a lot of bad blood between the UK and President Mbeki, and the bilateral relationship will likely not improve until there is a change in RSA leadership and some movement on Zimbabwe, i.e. President Mugabe leaves office or RSA denounces the second round of elections. The

UK-RSA Bilateral Forum, a long standing commitment, appears to be a UK attempt to invest in a better future bilateral relationship with South Africa, but is unlikely to improve current relations. End comment.

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